



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
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OCT 09 2014

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Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
1200 Franklin Way
Sparks, NV 89431

Donald Holmstrom, Acting District Manager
BLM Carson City District
5665 Morgan Mill Road
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Subject: Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment (Project), Alpine and Mono Counties, California; and Douglas, Esmeralda, Lyon, and Mineral Counties, Nevada. (CEQ# 20140190).

Dear Mr. Dunkelberger and Mr. Holmstrom:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Project pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. Our comments were also prepared under the authority of the provisions of the Federal Guidelines promulgated at 40 CFR 230 under Section 404(b) (1) of the Clean Water Act.

EPA supports the goal of refining strategies to conserve, enhance, and restore habitats to provide for the long-term viability of the greater sage-grouse. We understand that, with the 6 month extension of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service final decision on the potential listing of the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management decided to revise the original DEIS to analyze and consider updated information and public comments.

The RDEIS includes modification of the proposed action (Alternative B), addition of a new alternative (Alternative C), and the modified plan amendment area boundary. It also defines a new preferred alternative as including desired habitat conditions identified in table 2-1, all of the goals and objectives in table 2-3, and standards and guidelines as indicated in table 2-4 by the presence of an asterisk prior to the standard or guideline unique identifier (pg. 38). While it appears that the referenced tables incorporate components from both Alternatives B and C, it is difficult to determine exactly how they were integrated into the preferred alternative and which components would ultimately be incorporated into the Forest and Resource Management Plans. In table 2-4, there are multiple resources for which an asterisk appears prior to the standard or

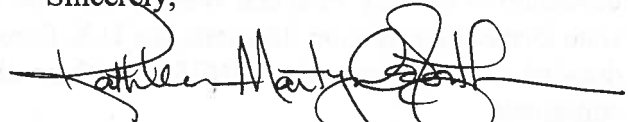
guideline unique identifier for the same resource for both Alternative B and C, although each alternative has very different protocols. For example, Alternative B-AR-S-05 prohibits new recreation facilities unless they will have a neutral or beneficial effect, while Alternative C-AR-S-04 would simply prohibit new recreation facilities (table 2-4, pg. 20), yet both are preceded by an asterisk. For clarity, EPA recommends that the FEIS clearly consolidate all of the components of the preferred alternative into a distinct and coherent description to facilitate its comparison to the other alternatives. Discuss, in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the rationale for each component, how it would be implemented, and how it would support the long term viability of the Bi-state DPS.

According to the RDEIS, allotments with Bi-state DPS habitat would be completely closed to grazing under Alternative C (pg. 45). This may have benefits to water bodies in the amendment area that may be currently impaired by impacts associated with grazing; however, the proximity of the proposed grazing restrictions to such water bodies is unclear. We recommend that this be clarified in the FEIS. We also recommend that the FEIS discuss whether the proposed grazing restrictions in Bi-state DPS habitat would be expected to result in increased grazing in other areas and, if so, what the impacts of such a shift in grazing patterns would be.

We have rated the RDEIS (all alternatives) as LO (Lack of Objections; see enclosed EPA Rating Definitions). Although, as discussed above, certain details of the preferred alternative are unclear, we understand that it is comprised of elements of the proposed action, which EPA previously rated LO in our comments on the DEIS, and elements of the more conservative Alternative C. Our review has not identified any potential environmental impacts that would alter our previous assessment of the proposed action nor require any substantive changes to the preferred alternative; however, we continue to have the same recommendations as stated in our November 19, 2013 DEIS comment letter.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this RDEIS and are available to discuss our comments and recommendations provided. Please send a hard copy of the FEIS to this office when it is officially filed. If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3521 or contact Anne Ardillo, the lead reviewer for this project. Anne can be reached at (415) 947-4257 or ardillo.anne@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Martyn Goforth, Manager
Environmental Review Section (ENF-4-2)

Enclosure

cc: Jim Winfrey, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Colleen Sievers, BLM Carson City District

SUMMARY OF EPA RATING DEFINITIONS*

This rating system was developed as a means to summarize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) level of concern with a proposed action. The ratings are a combination of alphabetical categories for evaluation of the environmental impacts of the proposal and numerical categories for evaluation of the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE ACTION

“LO” (Lack of Objections)

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

“EC” (Environmental Concerns)

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impact. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

“EO” (Environmental Objections)

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

“EU” (Environmentally Unsatisfactory)

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potentially unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

ADEQUACY OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

Category “1” (Adequate)

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category “2” (Insufficient Information)

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category “3” (Inadequate)

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

*From EPA Manual 1640, Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment

